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UTAH DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

BLM

Summary

The UPCD consists of: Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Utah Department of Natural Resources, Utah Division of Water Resources, State Institutional and Trust Lands Administration, Agriculture Resource Service, Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands, Utah Association of Conservation Districts, Utah Grazing Improvement Program, USDA-Farm Service Agency, USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service, Utah Partners for Conservation and Development, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

UPCD

Utah Partners for
Conservation &
Development

Rancher Relief Efforts for 2007 Utah Wildfire and Drought

The historic wildfires of 2007 have caused extraordinary losses to Utah livestock operators and farmers. As a result of this natural disaster, and the persistent drought, the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) has called for emergency relief for our farmers and ranchers. The following report outlines what specific aid is available from individual members of the UPCD and what policy changes are needed to prevent such catastrophic fires in the future

State and Federal agencies have come together under the umbrella of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (Utah PCD) to form a Collaborative Group Effort to design and Implement Stabilization actions for the entire burned area and to do so regardless of land ownership.

The UPCD announced plans in late July to work in two teams to find short and long term help for those in need. The first team's goal is to address the needs of the ranchers and farmers impacted.

The second team's goal is to address the needs to stabilize and restore the land damaged by the fires.

Damage Report

An estimated 500,000 acres of public and private rangeland have burned, rendering these lands virtually unusable for productive grazing. The loss of the use of these valuable lands is forcing some ranchers out of business and will have negative impacts on local rural economies as well as wildlife populations.

Aside from the financial impact, the fires are affecting the quality of life and public safety, both locally and statewide. With shrubs and grasses destroyed on thousands of acres, dust and ash clouds threaten air quality over a wide area of Utah. Four human deaths are attributed to the Milford Flat fire in central Utah when smoke and dust from the 350,000 acre fire reduced visibility on Interstate-15 in July and again in August.

The long term environmental impacts from soil erosion and flooding also remain a concern.

A rancher survey of the fire's impacts conducted by the UDAF produced the following information.

No. of ranchers	78
No. of ranchers intending to sell off animals	28
No. of cattle killed in fire	299
No. of sheep killed in fire	78
No. of cattle & sheep not accounted for (lost or dead)	1,305
Total damage estimate to fences, corrals, water systems, etc	\$2. 3 million
Estimated tons of feed needed for livestock (tons)	38,500
Estimated cost of needed feed (@\$100/ton)	\$3.8 million
No of ranchers seeking economic/family counseling	6

Short term action

- Utah Governor, Jon Huntsman, Jr., declared 25 of the state's 29 counties disaster areas and was granted a federal disaster declaration by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Aug. 21, 2007. This federal designation makes low-interest loans and other programs available to affected operators.
- The USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) made \$301,000 in grants available to operators to assist with the regeneration of Tribal or private grazing lands impacted by the 2007 wildfires.
- Other partner agencies have also secured funds for reseeding, fence repairs and other projects. A complete list of assistance being made available can be found on the following pages.
- UDAF's Grazing Improvement Program has secured \$2 million to purchase seed.

Long term needs

Declaring war on cheat grass.

The rehabilitation of the lost range land will be a long-term effort. Affected operators will face hardships as they work to remain in business.

The prevention of future catastrophic fires is possible with the proper range environment in place. A land management policy that emphasizes Healthy Lands has the potential to reduce fire suppression costs by tens of millions of dollars per year. Nationally fire suppression is estimated to cost \$150 per acre, compared with healthy land management approaches that cost from \$40 to \$50 per acre.

Healthy Lands policies emphasize fire preventative measures such as replacing fire-prone cheat grass with other less volatile species. This option enhances range ecosystems and offers environmental benefits statewide.

Elements under consideration in Utah include:

- Reducing hazardous fuels such as cheat grass on private, state and federal lands.
- Conducting emergency stabilization and rehabilitation work on landscapes and communities affected by wildland fire.
- Treatments accomplished using prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, herbicides, grazing, or combinations of these and other methods.

The UPCD is purchasing fire resistant grass seed and plans to begin planting the Milford Flat fire area in late October of 2007. A region-wide coordination of such healthy lands policies will reinforce its effectiveness.

UPCD AGENCY REPORTS

USU Extension

UDAF and extension personnel have identified most of the producers affected by the major fires that have occurred this summer. A set of handouts have been prepared by USU extension and ARS personnel. These fact sheets have been sent to each of the producers that have been identified. These materials provide basic information about some of the alternatives these producers might use in adjusting their operations in an effort to minimize the negative impacts of fire. Workshops have been scheduled for Fillmore, Richfield, Park Valley, Roosevelt and Nephi that will help ranchers identify and evaluate actions they might take as they adjust to the impacts they have experienced from the drought as well as fires. These workshops will be held in late September. Producers interested in attending one of these workshops or in scheduling a similar workshop in another area should contact their local county agent. Materials of interest to those affected by the drought or the fires are also being developed and are being posted on the agribusiness web site (<http://extension.usu.edu/agribusiness>). Farmers and ranchers can also post their desires for or availability of feed and forage on the Utah Ag Exchange web site that is maintained at USU (<http://UtahAgExchange.org>).

USDA – NRCS

The Utah NRCS State Office, under the leadership of State Conservationist Sylvia Gillen, obtained \$301,000 in federal funding under the agency's 2007 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to assist with the regeneration of Tribal or private grazing lands impacted by the 2007 wildfires in Utah. The application period for the funds was extended until August 17 at noon. By that date, 39 applications had been received from both Tribal and private land owners requesting a total of \$424,801 in financial assistance. Applicants from that pool will now be selected to receive the \$301,000 in available funding. The funds will pay \$11 per acre to rest grazing lands until October 1, 2008. Gillen expressed hope that these funds will assist the eligible producers to carry out conservation and improvement practices that will help heal and improve range conditions. Applications were received from the following counties: Beaver, Box Elder, Duchesne, Iron, Juab, Kane, Millard, Rich, Tooele, Uintah, and Utah. This successful outreach effort was achieved through the hard work of local NRCS field offices, and a coordinated public information campaign that included the mailing of 300 post cards, a news release, and radio news announcements.

SITLA

During this year of extreme fire loss and hazards, SITLA is involved in the following fire rehab efforts:

- Milford Flat Fire - Coordination with other state and federal agencies in evaluating and prioritizing trust lands as candidates for seeding and application type. At this point, approximately 7,700 acres of trust lands appear to be high priority for rehabilitation (one-half earmarked for flyover seeding; the other half suitable for mechanized chaining or drilling). Approximately 5,000 additional trust land acres have been identified for second priority consideration. SITLA will also be providing its own staff resources to address cultural resource identification efforts on affected properties.
- M & M Fire - Coordinating with other state agencies for a green stripping project on approximately 40 acres of trust lands and seeding other smaller isolated pieces infested with cheat grass. \$8,000 committed by SITLA for the project.

- Cedar Fort - Coordinating with DWR and FF&SL to treat 400 trust land acres of the 800 - 900 acre area burned. Nearly 100 acres are earmarked for chaining. Sheep trampling will be used to stir seed into the soil. \$9,000 committed by SITLA for the project.
- Kimball Fire - Considering green stripping project on section of trust lands on the south end of this fire. Coordinating with DWR and surrounding land owners to evaluate the merits of this project.
- Paradise Fire in Hamblin Valley - 430 acres of seeding on trust lands; \$7,000 SITLA investment - Grazing permittee is cost sharing in this project
- Greenville Bench Fire in Beaver County - 1,300 acres burned; plan to reseed all acres with various partners, including 4000 lbs of seed from SITLA. In addition, other trust lands within the Greenville Bench prescribed burn will be seeded in coordination with NRCS and DWR. SITLA will provide \$5,000 for this prescribed burn project.
- Salt Creek - 400 acres of trust lands involved in this fire. SITLA is coordinating with DWR to evaluate the merits of seeding trust lands. Steep slopes and rough terrain will generally make it impractical for mechanical rehab.; however, a flyover seeding followed by sheep trampling to stir seed into the soil is being considered.
- Winecup - As of the date of this report, still learning more about this fire. SITLA staff is scheduled to investigate impacts later this week.
- SITLA also entered into an MOU with DWR committing at least \$100,000.00 towards the purchase of seed for anticipated rehab projects with trust land nexus.

U.S. Forest Service

The Forest Service, on behalf of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development completed an Interagency Coordination Guide that will assist communities, Tribes, and private landowners before, during, and after wildfires. The guide is a collection of resources and contact information for state and federal agencies that have programs available to assist communities impacted by wildfire. It is available in printed form and on Utahfireinfo.gov. Additionally, the Utah National Forests are remain committed to working with grazing permittees affected by 2007 wildfires. Permittees should directly contact local Ranger District offices.

Utah Dept. of Agriculture and Food — Animal Industry

During mid August the Department completed and received all fire surveys. All ranchers that indicated on their survey that they had private ground involved in the fire were given a reminder call from our office about the need to get into the local NRCS office and apply for available funds. Requests jumped from 19 to 33 as a result. Names and addresses of all effected ranchers have been provided to Bruce Godfrey of USU to be used in additional mailings.

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Utah Dept. of Agriculture and Food

Utah Grazing Improvement Program (UGIP)

UGIP range managers and State Soil Conservation Districts are working with locals owners to assure that critical ranges and watersheds on state and private lands be restored. The UDAF and Department of Natural Resources have jointly allocated \$2 million to purchase seed for restoration work. Individual land owners will share in the costs of applying and planting the seed on their property. Regional UGIP coordinators along with the USDA– NRCS, Utah Soil Conservation District personnel are

working with private land owners on the technical aspect of the restoration.

UGIP is partnering with the BLM on the Milford Flat fire project and UGIP is taking the lead in restoration work in Box Elder County.

USDA – FSA

- Received notice that \$132,000 in ECP funds have been made available for water hauling in Garfield, Kane and San Juan counties.
- We received notice that USDA has made all \$16 million available for ECP requests. We are waiting for notice on our other ECP requests.
- Numerous ECP requests have been recently submitted and approved for various parts of the state, including \$813,000 for fence lines and water projects in our Beaver office. We are awaiting funds.
- Steve Connelly, Deputy Administrator for FSA, toured parts of eastern and northern Utah on Wednesday and Thursday of this week. He viewed fire, flood and drought damage.
- Work continues in gathering information to formally request CRP grazing.

UTAH DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The size (Utah's largest wildfire on record) and intensity of this wildfire caught the attention of every Utah citizen. The Governor stressed the critical issue of everyone working together to stabilize this area following the fire. The local residents were highly impacted emotionally and financially by the loss of vegetation cover and forage. These folks see the potential for massive dust storms, possible flooding and loss of forage for their livestock as major problems. State and Federal agencies have come together under the umbrella of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (Utah PCD) to form a Collaborative Group Effort to design and Implement Stabilization actions for the entire burned area and to do so regardless of land ownership. An Implementation Team was formed which included members from every agency (UDAF, UDNR, UDWR, SITLA, ARS, Utah FFSL, UACD, Utah GIP, FSA, NRCS, UPCD, BLM BIA) as well as the County Commissions and Private Landowners.

The following is a priority list that will guide our actions.

1. Risks to People and Property

- a. Could include dust clouds crossing I-15, etc. (a very high priority)
- b. Risk of dust clouds to populated areas (air quality)
- c. Floods - risk to people, structures, water supplies, etc.
- d. Other

2. Risks - Ecological/Environmental

- a. Erosion - wind/water - loss of soil
- b. Threatened, Endangered species at risk or of special value (sage grouse habitat and mule deer winter range)
- c. Cheat grass expansion - not necessarily reclamation
- d. Other Invasive species such as spurge, knapweed, Scotch thistle & white-top

3. Cost/Benefit - Best bang for the buck

- a. Soil type/range site/rainfall/etc. (Kochia use and Breaking the Fire/Cheat grass Fire Cycle)
(Consider strip seeding where scarce seed is a problem)
- b. Private Landowners willing to cost share. Do a good job of seed application and incorporation if provided the seed

Timelines for action :

- 8/20 = Cadastral Survey begins in SE Corner of Millard Co.
- 8/21 = A new Assistance Agreement started by Marilyn Chapman
- 8/24 = Start Contract Process for fence removal, aerial seeding, drilling, chaining, imprint seeding, sediment containment structures, invasive weed inventories and treatments, Cheat grass spraying fall and spring with Roundup, Protective fence construction and cattle guards, horse gather.
- 8/27 = Begin flagging treatment areas and fence removal locations.
- 9/10 = Start the Archaeological Contract
 - = Start the Aerial Seeding Contract
- 9/24-10/10 = Chaining Contract for on hand aerially seeded areas
 - = Drill seed areas with on hand seed using force account crews
- 9/27 = Expected BLM seed delivery date
- 9/30 = BLM's Rehabilitation Plans Due at the WO for Rehab efforts
- 9/15 - 10/1 = Fall spray of cheat grass with Roundup (Timing is moisture and temperature dependent)
- 10/15 = Drill selected seed areas with seed from the BLM Seed Buy
- 11/30 = Normal "Winter Out" point
- 3/10 = Possible restart after "Winter Out" period
- 3/15 - 4/15 = Spring Drilling and Chaining
- 4/15 = The last day to seed with any hope of success

BLM—reseeding

Seeding Operations: Four seed mixes will be used on a total of 122,202 acres proposed for reseeding. Ten sets of triple drills are planned for use as well as one or two Imprinters and multiple aerial contracts to accomplish this seeding effort.

Ground Treatments: Ground Treatments includes drill and imprinter seeding or any seed applied by a ground based implement. There are 35,136 acres proposed for ground based treatment (34,453 acres drill seeding and 683 acres imprinter seeded).

Aerial Treatments: There are 87,066 acres proposed for aerial seeding with the entire area planned for single chaining to cover the seed

Invasive Weed Actions: The burn area will require a noxious weed inventory (88,757 acres on BLM) with infestations mapped and treated by herbicides or mechanically.

The cheat grass (Brte) area (23,081 acres) will require a fall Roundup spray by aerial contract and possibly again in the spring prior to drill seeding the area.

Summary

The rehabilitation of the lost range land will be a long-term effort. In the interim, ranchers are faced with either moving their animals to other land, purchasing feed to supplement what grazing land they have left, or sell off their herds temporarily or permanently.

The UPCD recognizes that the effected operators will endure hardships even during restoration efforts. The Partners will continue to work with ranchers during and after this year's fire season to assure they receive all the assistance available. The assistance intervention team might be needed to interact with operators to facilitate their application for assistance.